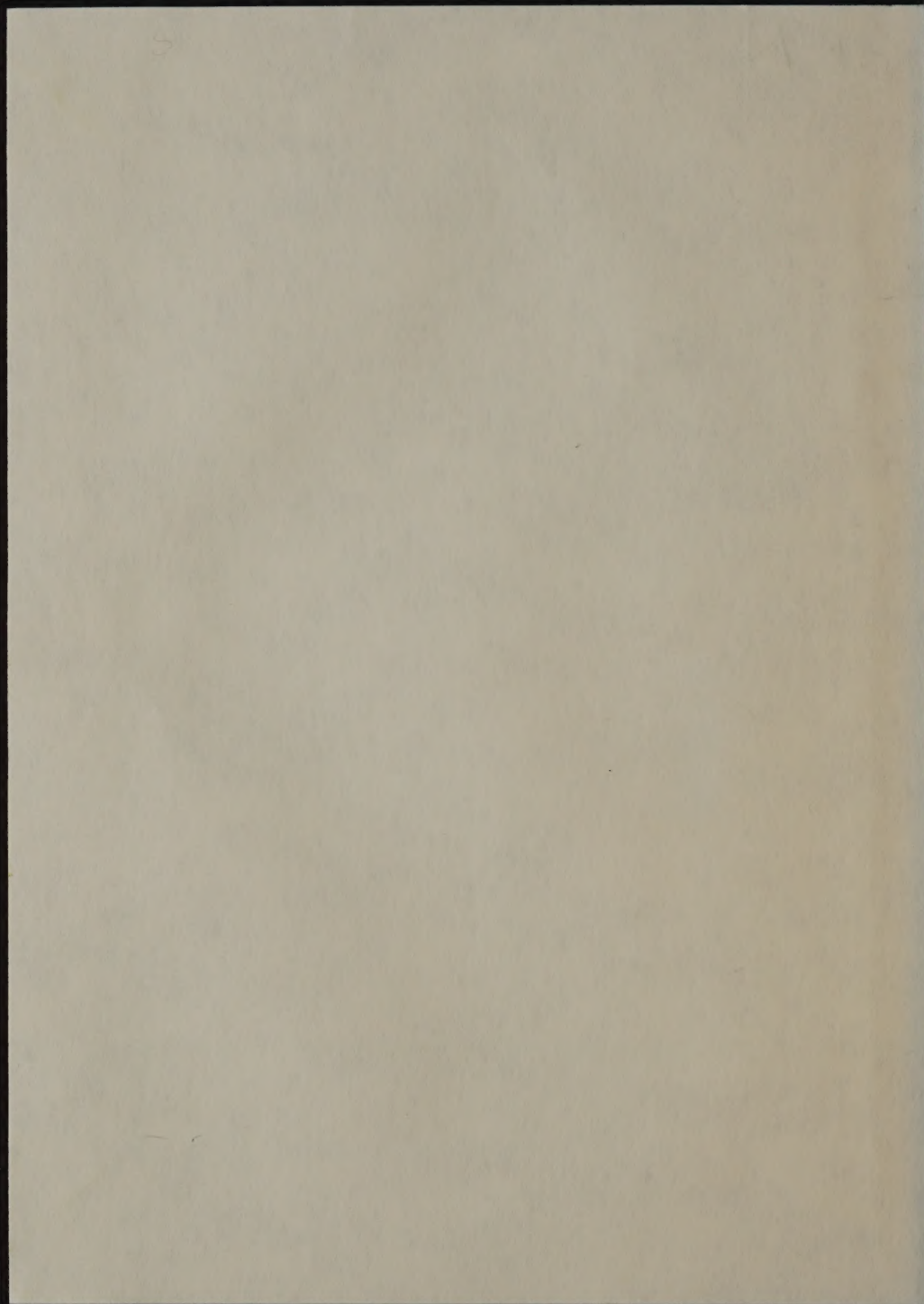




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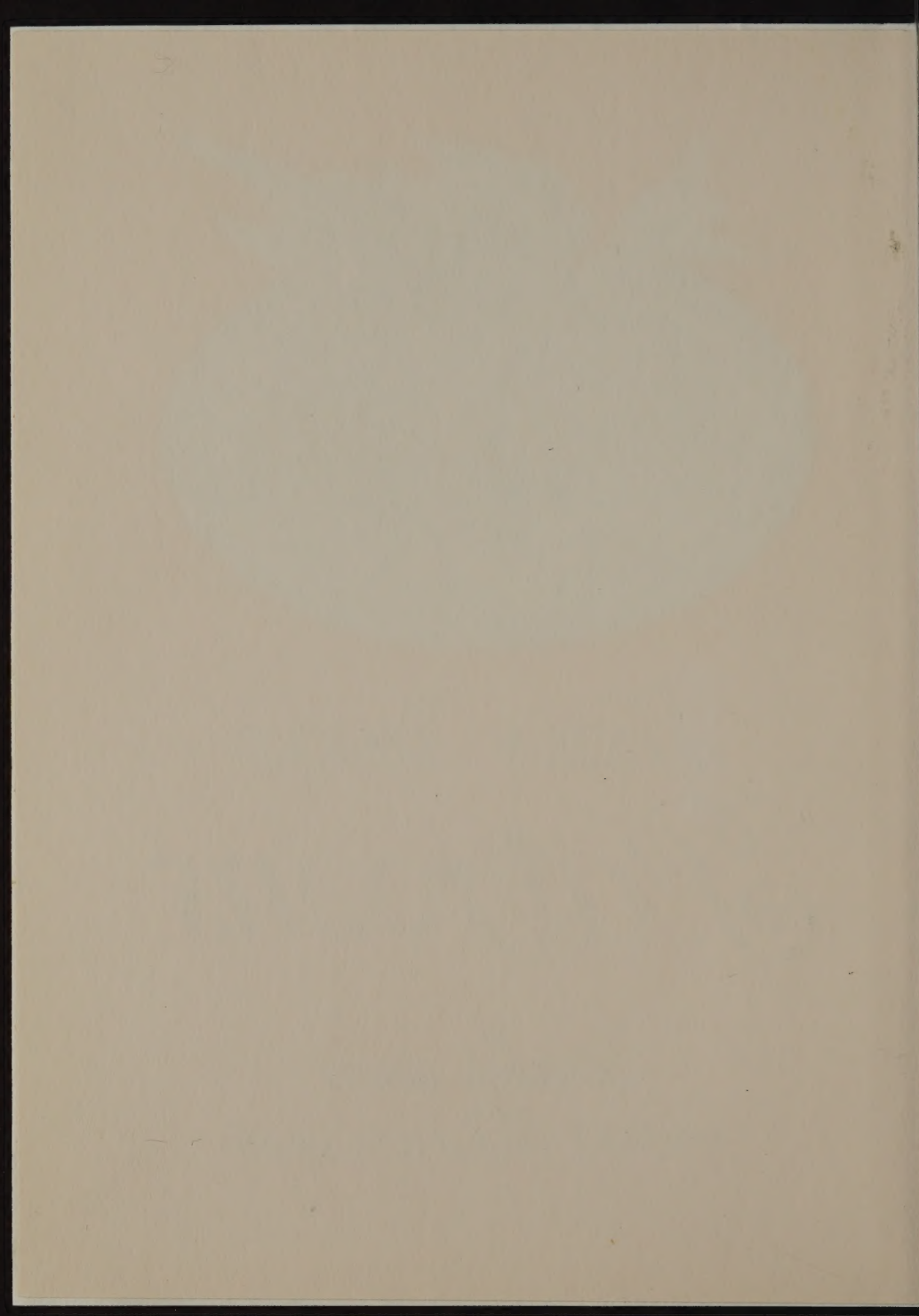






STATEN ISLAND  
*Patrooms*

BY  
THEODORA DUBOIS  
AND  
DOROTHY VALENTINE SMITH





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Published by  
The Staten Island Historical Society  
John Frederick Smith Publication Fund  
1961

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## Staten Island Patroons

The first Europeans to venture through the narrow stretch of water that seemed to be the outlet of a vast lake were probably Vikings, for Norsemen in the eleventh century were known to have explored as far as the present city of Albany, where they were forced to spend the winter when the river suddenly froze over, locking them in ice.

Verrazano, the Italian navigator in the employ of France, searching for the elusive passage to Cathay, cautiously anchored his little *Dolphin* one morning in mid-April, 1524 and ventured in a small boat through the Narrows into the harbor. The neighboring hillsides were "alive with peering savages" dressed in the feathers of birds of various colors. They greeted the explorers with loud shouts of welcome and about thirty canoes paddled by curious natives darted back and forth across and around Verrazano's boat. But a sudden violent wind blew in from the sea forcing the intrepid captain to return to his awaiting *Dolphin*.

A year later came another explorer, the Spanish captain Estevan Gomez, also seeking the mythical passage to Cathay, and by 1540 various French skippers reported going up the "River of the Steep Hills" as far as the Norsemen had 500 years before. They traded with the Mohawks and built themselves a small fort. Later they put up a blockhouse on Manhattan Island. Records also show that as early as 1598 subjects of the Lords States-General of the Netherlands, and especially those in the employ of the Greenland Company, had frequented "this country solely for the purpose of the fur trade."

On the 3rd of September, 1609 Henry Hudson, an English captain exploring for the Dutch in his *Half Moon*, dropped anchor somewhere between Sandy Hook and Staten Island. Later when he entered the bay "the people of the country came aboard us, seeming very glad of our coming, and brought greene tobacco, and gave us of it for knives and beads. They goe in deere skins loose, well dressed. They have yellow copper. They desire cloathes, and are very civill . . . At night they went on land againe, so wee rode very quiet, but durst not trust them. . ."

The riches of the East via uncharted seas were a powerful magnet to Europeans. Who knew but that just around the next vague headland, the next long point to the east and north, one might not come upon a vast river, the long sought passageway to the Orient with all its fabulous wealth? Even though he did not gain the Cathay port, any adventurous captain voyaging to the New World might find and take back to his sovereign or less exalted employers such richness as the Spaniards had plundered from the Aztecs or from the Incas in far off Peru.

Because of Hudson's discoveries and those of the several other captains from Holland, the Dutch claimed the territory which was to be called New Netherland. Its boundaries were Virginia on the southwest, New England on the northeast, Canada on the north, the ocean on the coast, and inland boundaries on the northwest that were wholly unknown. England claimed the eastern seaboard of America north of Spanish Florida because of Cabot's discoveries but did not actively dispute the Dutch claim then because for the present both countries were allies.

The harbor that Verrazano, Hudson and the others had entered was incomparable and magnificent. Sailors coming in at sunset breathed deeply of land fragrances: pines and ferns, drifting scent of wood smoke, the sweet poignancy of wild grapes. This was a good place. It promised well.

The island called Manhattan was a natural trading center. Indians had used it for generations as a place to exchange beaver and otter skins and other peltries. Europeans soon put it to the same use. Several Amsterdam merchants in 1614 asked for and obtained a charter from their High Mightinesses, the States-General at the Hague, which allowed them exclusive trade to New Netherland for a three-year period. A few years later the same Lords States-General, after lengthy and intense study, and probably influenced by the success of the Dutch East India Company, approved the establishment of the Dutch West India Company. Accordingly a charter was issued in June 1621 and subscriptions books opened for stockholders. When subscriptions finally closed two years later the active life of the company began and the little United New Netherland Company, which had been trading around the mouth of the great river, was merged with the new corporation. The river called Mauritius in the beginning to honor Prince Maurice, the Stadholder, soon became better known as the North or Hudson.

The sweep of the operation area for the Dutch West India Company was enormous. It had a monopoly to trade between Dutch ports and the west coast of Africa and all the coasts of America. The new company's administrative power was equally impressive. With the exception of declaring war it had complete control over its territories



to the extent of appointment and removal of officers, enactment of laws, establishment of courts, and conduct of affairs with the "Barbarians." Self government, however, was not transferred to New Netherland. Laws for the colonizers were made in the Amsterdam Chamber of the West India Company, administered by the Company's agent or Director General of the Province. The government was simple but the people themselves had no part in it.

The good ship *New Netherland* with the first group of permanent settlers arrived at Manhattan in the spring of 1623. When two ship-loads of cattle, horses, swine and sheep arrived some months later it would seem that the settlement was truly established.

By the time the forty-six-year-old Walloon, Peter Minuit, successor to Cornelis May and William Verhulst as Director General, arrived in May 1626 there was a small and crude hamlet nestled about Fort Amsterdam. Some of the nearly 200 inhabitants lived inside the ramparts of the fort, some outside. There were a windmill, a counting house, a bakery, a midwife's house, one for the guards with "lattice work," and a place for the goats. About thirty one-storied "residences" with bark roofs were on the street, later to be known as Pearl, parallel to the East river, and also on that river bank was established a shipyard with a sailmaker's loft.

It has been said that at least two thirds of the inhabitants of Manhattan called "Dutch" were from the southern or Belgic part of the seventeen Netherlands provinces, either Flemings who spoke Dutch or Walloons who spoke French. In religion the Walloons from Belgium and the Huguenots from France were one, as were the Pilgrims and Puritans. Walloon and Huguenot spiritual life were much alike, although few of those living in the new Dutch colony had crossed the Atlantic in search of religious freedom or were specially idealistic. Their main goal seems to have been to establish a good living for themselves and their families and to make as much money as possible. In contrast some have been described as "poor as worms; and lazy withal" but such folk must have been few; and lazy or not, every man who came must have been lured by his own secret and splendid visions of success.

Those visions had to be particularly alluring, for life in Holland was generally good, with complete security for person and property, religious tolerance, many comforts and general well being. A man needed boundless ambition or the thirst for adventure or the need to escape to leave all this for the uncertainty of the New World and a voyage that took from six weeks to three months.

The dangers, hardships and discomforts of an ocean crossing



were appalling. Passengers in dark, leaking cramped quarters; the strong smell of bellowing animals below deck, vermin, a scant supply of bad water; meals of fish heads, of tainted meat, maggoty biscuits; storms, seasickness, the little ship heeled over and fighting mountainous waves! Such a voyage was only for the stouthearted and venturesome.



After six years the West India Company was discouraged with the slow growth of its colony. There was considerable trade but the number of settlers did not meet the Company's expectations nor was there a dominie or a schoolmaster among the inhabitants. In 1629, to promote agriculture and the establishment of many new farms and homes the Company issued a charter of Privileges and Exemptions. This gave a patroonship to any member of the Company who, within the next four years, brought to New Netherlands fifty adults and established them.

Among the provisions was the development of separate settlements or manors under proprietors or Patroons, who would be granted complete manorial privileges as well as those for trading and for exemptions of taxes. It was believed that these privileges and tax exemptions would be tempting enough to provide capital from merchants and others eager to add to their wealth and to burghers who aspired to raise their position in the world by owning landed estates. The Patroon was full proprietor of his manor. He could bequeath it by will. He had the exclusive right of hunting and fishing within its thousands of acres and could grant this right to whomsoever he wished. He was his own chief magistrate, holding manorial court. He bore the expense of clearing the land, building farm houses and barns for his people and providing tools and cattle. His colonists or tenants bound themselves to remain for a definite period of time, to pay the Patroon a fixed rent, usually in stock and produce, to give certain parts of the increase of cattle and crops to him, and to grind all grains at the Patroon's mill.

The next year, in the summer of 1630, three patroonships were granted. One went to Michael Pauw, Lord of Achtienhoven, a man of means in Holland and a director of the Company. He received land covering the present areas of Hoboken, Jersey City, Bayonne and all of Staten Island, the latter so called in honor of the Staaten, or States-General. Pauw set up his first colony on the site of Jersey City and built himself a house, but there is no record of his occupying Staten Island or of attempting to do anything with it. He had trouble with the Indians, his enterprise brought in no revenue over expense, and seven years later in 1637 the West India Company purchased his patroonship rights for 26,000 guilders. Apparently he had been more or less forced to sell. Such was the brief and unsuccessful experience of Staten Island's first Patroon.

With the necessities of life the new country provided well for its settlers, although for some existence at first might be rugged. Dangers from the natives were at a minimum under Minuit, who knew how to win their confidence and to keep them well disposed. His successor, Wouter van Twiller, who had arrived in April 1633 with a force of 104 soldiers, the first dominie, and the first schoolmaster, also maintained peaceful relations with the Indians.

Van Twiller was scarcely settled when he received a visit from David Pieterszen deVries. DeVries with other directors of the Dutch West India Company had founded a colony on the South (Delaware) river two years before. This recently, had been destroyed by Indians.

De Vries was a man of considerable fame as a merchant skipper, traveler and Master of Artillery in the service of the United Provinces. He had joined the venture into patroonship with equal rank with the others and had had much to do with the fitting out of the ships for the voyage, as well as for the whale fishing which was planned along with the agricultural pursuits of tobacco planting and grain raising. Fish oil was selling at 60 guilders a hogshead and the new Patroons anticipated a handsome profit.

The name De Vries means "the Frisian." David Pieterszen had been born in 1592 or '93 in La Rochelle, France, where his father, a native of Hoorn in north Holland, had lived at different times since 1584. His mother was originally from Amsterdam. The family returned to Amsterdam when David Pieterszen was about five years of age and his training from early youth had been thorough in merchandizing and in overseas trade. In 1618 as owner and commander of a new ship of 400 tons burden, mounting eight guns, he had sailed to the Mediterranean. The following year he went to Newfoundland for a cargo of cod, which he sold in Spain. Not only was he successful in his codfish venture but he achieved such fame by defeating pirates off Cartagena





Dus maakte een kloetse haat ons David voor wiens dagh.  
 America verbaarde en tye in onmagt lagh:  
 Doen d' eerste orangje vlag haer op vrees huan geloken  
 Veen Turck of wilde Moor heeft gyt zyn moed vootoken.  
 Veen min him overhijerd Soavezo sag zyn hant  
 Nu hie God en Goddy voick in Vancerys portloze brant.  
 Nu hie lijn de schoot van Heoren vut de schinnen.  
 Nu vuenken viangered, de wapen-zorg becomen.



that the Duc de Guise engaged him to fight against the Turks. De Vries was pleased to take himself and his ship against the Turks, but when the Duc wanted him to fight against the Huguenots at La Rochelle he refused, sold his vessel and returned by land to Holland. The Dutch West India Company prevented him from going to Canada for furs some months later. Finally in 1627 he made his longest voyage, this time a three-year expedition to the East Indies, which so added to his reputation that two months after his return he was offered a part in the new patroonship on New Netherland's southern boundary.

Since the Indians had wiped out the little colony on the Delaware and whale fishing had proved unprofitable De Vries, looking for another venture, sailed to Manhattan.

He was not impressed by Wouter van Twiller, the new governor. De Vries quite obviously thought that the rotund Director owed his office to his relationship by marriage to the powerful Van Rensselaer family, since previously Van Twiller had been only one of the Company's clerks in the Amsterdam warehouse. DeVries was critical of the governor's excessive drinking and berated him for allowing an English ship captain to fire salutes to the English king and go sailing up the river named in honor of the Prince of Orange.

De Vries told Van Twiller: "I would have made him (the Englishman) go from the fort by the persuasion of some *iron beans* sent him by our guns and would not have allowed him to go up the river . . . we did not put up with those things in the East Indies . . . There we taught them to behave . . ."

A few days later De Vries had another clash with Van Twiller when he started to sail his small yacht up the East river to Hellgate. The governor ordered boats alongside to prevent passage. De Vries protested, claiming his privileges as one of the Nineteen Directors of the Company. Van Twiller replied that he intended to search the boat as was "customary amongst all princes and monarchs," and ordered the guns of the fort pointed at the yacht.

De Vries tartly told the governor that it seemed that the country was full of fools; that if he had to fire at something he ought to have fired at the Englishman who had violated the rights of the river.

Finally the captain had his way, swinging north to Hellgate.

"But he came again to vex me," De Vries complained, for it seems that the ship would not be cleared until it had been inspected.

"I told him," De Vries reported, "that my vessel was not to be visited; that I was bound to the fatherland, that if he had letters, he could send them after me. . ."

Van Twiller then ordered twelve soldiers to prevent De Vries' departure but the captain's men rowed him away to his ship which had

been anchored behind Governor's Island.

The last act of the farce was played down the bay when the sheriff and secretary, sent to detain De Vries, were liberally plied with wine from his best cask. This further confirmed his opinion that the Company was sending fools to the colony who knew nothing except "how to drink themselves drunk."

The voyage home took two months and De Vries found himself berated by some of the directors because he had traded a few beaver skins.

"Certainly a circumstance," he argued, "not worth the while to talk of. A Patroon had the privilege to do so."

Colony making at this time was suspended, with the directors doing nothing but "fighting with their own shadows. As I was at variance with my associates, and they being all Directors of the West India Company, and continually quarreling with one another, I have resigned."

But De Vries did not remain inactive long. In July 1634 he was off with friends in a partnership to form a colony on the coast of Guiana. They sailed on the *Koning David*, carrying fourteen guns, with thirty planters and twenty-five head of cattle.

During the ensuing months De Vries spent his time between Guiana and Virginia, with a brief trip to Fort Amsterdam, where he found Van Twiller still the governor.

On the 13th of August, 1636 he asked Van Twiller to "put Staten Island down in my name, intending to form a colony there which was granted."

Before the captain returned to Holland the first gunner of the fort gave him a "frolic." A tent was erected on one of the points of the fort and tables and benches set up for the guests. With the wine flowing freely and "glee at its height" the trumpeter blew a blast which started a quarrel. The trumpeter thrashed several of his critics, who rushed home for their swords to continue the battle. But apparently they forgot to return and in the sober light of the next morning friendly relations were resumed.

All this further convinced De Vries that the Company's officials at Manhattan were a pack of fools fit only for drinking. In the East Indies they would not have been fit even for assistants.

Back in Amsterdam again and learning that Van Twiller was soon to be recalled De Vries applied to the Company to be sent as Director in Van Twiller's place. This petition was rejected. Then with his usual energy and attention to details he set about completing preparations for his voyage to his new patroonship on Staten Island.



What might colonists to New Netherland expect to find? Emigrants had been told that the soil was rich and adapted to the bearing of all kinds of summer and winter crops, with much less tilling and labor than at home. There was fine timber suitable for the construction of houses and ships and for export: a great variety of nuts, beech, hazel, chestnut and hickory. The latter was popular for firewood. There were such fruits as small apples, wild cherries, plums, medlars, strawberries in profusion, black currants, gooseberries, and grapes of many kinds, some of which could be made into delicate wines. Melons grew abundantly and pumpkins were of a better flavor than those at home. Indian corn was carefully tended for it amply supplied a farmer's needs as did the Turkey wheat or maize which was also a hardy grain growing in almost any soil. Tobacco was easy to raise. Its leaves were often three-quarters of a yard long and much of the crop was as good as the Virginia variety, although it did not bring as high a price nor have so excellent a flavor.

True there were bears, wolves and foxes but there were also many deer. Birds, including water fowl, were numerous. There were river fish such as shad, carp, perch, pike, and roach, while from the sea were cod, herring, mackerel and shellfish.

Indians made their white and black wampum by polishing the shells of clam and periwinkle that they gathered on the beaches of Long Island. These they strung into lengths. Traders and colonists were finding wampum a more convenient form of money than other objects of exchange. They were becoming increasingly aware that in the New World shells and beaver skins were money. Also to newcomers was the possibility of incredible treasures to be found inland, in mines, in distant mountains, or even in pearl beds along Manhattan or Staten Island shores.



As to Indians on Staten Island there were less than 100 men, women and children. Contemporary records describe the natives as being of ordinary stature, strong and broad shouldered. To the Dutch familiar with South America they resembled Brazilians in color or the tawny gypsies who rambled about the Netherlands. These Indians were nimble of foot, perceptive, of few words, often treacherous, vindictive, but brave. In their habits they were said to be extremely dirty and slovenly. For clothing, men and women wore a piece of duffels, or of deerskin or elk hide, to cover their nakedness. Some had bearskins made into a kind of doublet. Others wore coats fashioned from racoons, wild cats, wolves, beaver and the like. Leggings and coverings for the feet were made from deer or elk skins. For adornment some of the savages wore chains of wampum and, it was said "long deer hair, dyed red, in ringlets to encircle the head." Their food included the flesh of game, even badgers, dogs and eagles, fish, snakes, frogs, maize bread and a porridge called sappaen, made from maize.

Since De Vries knew all these facts at first hand he was in an excellent position to arouse the enthusiasm of potential colonists. Doubtless as he completed his arrangements in Amsterdam he was encouraged when the Company adopted a new and more lenient policy in regard to monopolies. Henceforth the fur trade and the right to hold and cultivate land was open to anyone, to foreigners as well as to citizens of the Netherlands. Regulations were few and moderate. The Company retained for itself only one monopoly: that of transporting settlers, with their possessions, at a reasonable charge.

Other encouragements gave an impetus to emigrations. A farmer eager to start at once with his family would be carried to New Netherland without charge. He would be provided with a farm of a size that he could cultivate easily and profitably, together with a house, a barn, four horses, four cows, sheep and swine, and necessary tools—all for a term of six years. There were also certain provisions made for supplying the emigrant with clothes and other necessities on credit, as well as money loans in some instances.

In return the farmer agreed to pay a yearly rent in money, besides eighty pounds of butter. When the six years ended he must restore the equivalent of the live stock originally furnished, although he could retain for himself all the stock increase.

The effect from this drastic change of policy was all that the Company had hoped for. Emigrants of superior quality were attracted. These were not only separate families but parties of forty and fifty headed by men of standing and substance.

The first of these to set sail was David Pieterszen deVries' little band. On the 25th of September 1638 he and "some persons in my

A reported scene in New Netherland



service" went aboard the Company ship *DeLiefde* (Love or Charity) and on the same day weighed anchor and set sail along with some ships bound for Spanish ports and Gibraltar.

Three days later a Dunkirk frigate attacked but was beaten off. After they passed Madeira the long voyage settled down in earnest and it was not until the eighth of November that they sighted a West Indian island and hove to in the port of St. Christopher, where fresh supplies of food and water were put aboard.

The day after Christmas, running up the coast before the wind, De Vries told the captain that they were nearing Sandy Hook. Carefully eyeing the distant shore through the glass the captain reported seeing land covered with snow and, remembering the warmth of the West Indies, wanted to go back there to pass the winter. He then, De Vries said, "solicited me to pilot the ship in, which I did. . ."

"I brought the ship that same evening before Staten Island," De Vries noted in his journal, "which belonged to me, where I intended to settle my people, and in the dark let our anchor fall in eight fathoms."

In spite of fog next morning De Vries piloted the *De Liefde* up to Manhattan, anchoring opposite the fort. "We were received with much joy, as they did not expect to see a vessel at that time of year. I found there a governor William Kieft. He bade me welcome and invited me to his house."

The new governor seemed a vast improvement over Van Twiller, although the financial well-being of William Kieft, rather than the well-being of the colony, it was said, was the dominant interest of his life. However, thus far in his new post he had shown energy in improving conditions in New Netherland. He had inherited deplorable conditions. The fort was in sad disrepair as were houses, public buildings and the windmill. The Company's ships in the harbor were unseaworthy; its farms were, in many instances, tenantless and its cattle reduced to a small herd. Kieft had rated the inhabitants lawless and demoralized and had immediately issued stricter regulations for everyone to bring things into order.





By the time De Vries arrived in the last week of the year of 1638 there had been a considerable change for the better under Kieft, although men of good will were uneasy about his treatment of the Indians. His harshness promised eventual trouble. But New Netherlanders and Indians were encouraged by the coming of De Vries, the Patroon, a man of integrity who abhorred cruelty and scorned inefficiency.

De Vries kept his people on Manhattan till the fifth of January. Then they came down the bay to Staten Island, put in at the Watering Place and began "to plant a colony there and build."

Apparently the Patroon had no problem in selecting this site. Here, before putting out to sea, ships filled their casks from the generous springs flowing down into the bay. An ample water supply was assured and the land was level and sufficiently open, needing but a minimum of effort for the first plantings. His people could be snug for a time in roofed-over cellar dugouts, thatched with reeds, while preparing the land for the first crops of tobacco and maize, and getting the timber ready for the first houses and barns. As for food—game from the woods and fish and oysters from the bay added to the staples brought from Manhattan would keep their stomachs full.

While his people toiled on Staten Island, De Vries, always interested in seeing new places, sailed a "yacht" through Long Island Sound and up the Connecticut river as far as the Company's Fort Good Hope, where, despite Dutch protests, the English were starting a town called Hartford. He was impressed with the order and prosperity of the English in settlements that he visited on the way. In fact it is likely that because of the well-being of English colonists his annoyance with the Company was further intensified when he found on his return to Staten Island that the additional settlers and supplies promised him had failed to arrive. Two ships were lying off Manhattan, one belonging to the Company and the other a privately owned vessel carrying from Hoorn the cattle of a former friend of De Vries, but they had brought him nothing.

A year and two days after he had set up his colony at the Watering Place De Vries leased it to one of his men, Thomas Smythe, an Englishman. In February 1640 the disappointed Patroon arranged to start a plantation on Manhattan Island, several miles above the fort, on a fine situation with nearly sixty acres of corn land and acreage for hay. He would live at this new plantation half the time.

When spring came he sailed up the North river as far as Fort Orange searching for further islands. At Tappan he found a fertile valley of about 600 acres, with a creek suitable for several mill sites.

Without delay he bought the valley from its Indian owners and eagerly commenced planning for another plantation, this one to be called Vriesendael. In spite of his annoyance and disillusionment with the Company's continued failure to live up to its agreements, De Vries was determined to prosper with his various bouweries.

Meanwhile on Staten Island Thomas Smythe as leasee managed to raise fair crops and to add to the numbers of cattle and swine. However it was the swine that led later to a bloody massacre, known as the Pig War, and the ultimate wiping out of De Vries' settlement on the island. It all started in the darkness of a July night in 1640 when hogs belonging to the Patroon and to the Company were stolen at the Watering Place, the watch house robbed, and the yacht *de Vrede* attacked and other "trespasses committed."

When news of what had happened reached Kieft across the bay he ordered the Company's secretary, Cornelis van Tienhoven, to go at the head of an armed force of 100 men to demand satisfaction from the Raritan Indians who were accused of the depredation. Marching to where the Raritans lived near a small river "about five miles behind Staten Island," the soldiers were hot for plunder and killing. Van Tienhoven held them off for a while since his orders had been only to demand satisfaction. Finally he left saying they would be "responsible for the mischief which their disobedience would produce."

He was not beyond the sound of gunshots when the troops fired on the Indians. They killed several and captured the Chief's brother. One of the soldiers, De Vries soon learned, "mangled very much the body of the Chief's brother, standing on a mast with a split wood; and similar tyranny was committed by others in the service of the Company."

After this wanton cruelty the Dutch paid eighty fathoms of *sewan* as recompense but it is doubtful that any amount offered in compensation would satisfy the Raritans, especially since they continued to deny their guilt. They might be expected at any hour to swoop down on the Watering Place in reprisals.

Adding to De Vries' alarming problem was the arrival of the ship *Oak Tree* on the 20th of August 1641 "in which came a person named Malyn (Melyn), who said that Staten Island belonged to him, that it was given by the directors to him and to Heer vanderHorst which I could not believe, as I had sailed in the year thirty-eight to take possession of said island and had settled my men upon it. I thought better things of the directors than this. . ."

But De Vries had little time to brood over his betrayal by the Company's directors. The Raritans attacked his Staten Island plantation on the first of September, killing the men there and burning the

buildings to the ground. Perhaps, they taunted, the soldiers would now come to fight for the killing of De Vries' men as they had for the hogs. The Raritans declared that servants of the Company had been guilty of that theft. Apparently De Vries had come to believe the Indians. He acknowledged that they were "cunning enough" but that they would do no harm if no harm was done them.

And so his colony on Staten Island was "smothered in its birth."

A few days later Pachem, a chief of the Tankitekes, came to the fort bringing a dead hand hanging from a stick. This, he claimed, was the hand of the chief who had killed or shot with arrows De Vries' men on Staten Island. Pachem had taken revenge because he loved the Swannekens (Dutch) who were his best friends.

While De Vries mourned the destruction of his colony Kieft asked him to allow Cornelis Melyn "to go upon the point of Staten Island, where the maize land lay, saying he wished to let him plant it." The governor also told De Vries he would post soliders at the point who would signal by flag to the fort on Manhattan whenever ships were in the lower bay. De Vries consented to the proposals so long as his claim to the Island was "not prejudiced." He agreed to let Melyn use twelve to fifteen morgens of land (less than thirty acres) since, in addition to planting maize, he only intended to distill some brandy and "make goat's leather."

Apparently negotiations were continued throughout the winter and spring for on June 9, 1642 Melyn received a ground brief giving him the entire Island with the exception of the farm of David Peterse De Vries. Immediately the new Patroon, Staten Island's third, started plowing his fields and hewing timbers for a house and barns.





Cornelis Melyn was the first great democrat of this country. This is not of course in the sense of a democrat as opposed to a republican candidate at the polls but one who "favors a government controlled by the people, or one who believes in political and legal equality."

Since there seems to be no existing portrait of Melyn and no available description of his appearance, it has been necessary to create from his writings and the events of his life a portrait of his personality. It is true that Peter Stuyvesant referred to him as a "boorish brute," but since Stuyvesant did his best to hang Melyn, failing that threw him into prison more than once, and during eight years strove to ruin him, the governor's evaluation can scarcely be considered unprejudiced. From less biased contemporary sources Melyn appears to have been a person implacably opposed to the dictatorial conception of government and a consistent champion of the rights of man. He had courage, initiative and perseverance, but was regrettably lacking in tact and, at times, in courtesy and common sense. Furthermore he was tragically unlucky throughout his life.

His parents lived in Antwerp where Cornelis was born in 1600, the thirteenth child in his father's family of fifteen. His mother had been Marie Ghuedinx and was the second wife of Cornelis' father Andre Melyn. Both of these died within a sorrowful month of each other in 1606.

Andre Melyn was a carpenter and lumber merchant and for a time president of the carpenters' guild. This was a position of no little distinction. The guilds were important organizations in those days, the members taking pride in the quality of their work and taking pride also in giving elaborate festivals, celebrations memorable for music, good food and wine, brilliant costumes of silks and velvets, genial gaiety. Motley describes them in his "Rise of the Dutch Republic" and says that intellectual cultivation was diffused to a remarkable degree among the hard-working artisans and handicraftsmen of the great cities of the Netherlands.

Cornelis Melyn may not have remembered details of his father's days of prominence, still there was that tradition of honor in the family. It must have meant much to an impressionable boy.

He was six when his parents died and Abraham Melyn, an older half brother, became his guardian. Cornelis was sent to school until he was twelve, when he was apprenticed to a tailor. At eighteen he was released from apprenticeship for good character and because "he wanted to travel and study languages."

It is not known where he traveled at that period of his life or what languages he learned. At the age of twenty-six, "a dresser of soft leather," he inherited a little money from his father's estate and from

an uncle's. This enabled him to marry Janneke Adriens. As time passed they had ten children, several dying in infancy, one in an Indian attack, and one drowned. But in the sixteen-thirties their children were young, the future full of possibilities, and the present an extraordinary decade in which to be living in Holland.

This was the time of its "Tulipomania" when, for several years, the Dutch nation seemed to go into a phase of temporary mass insanity over speculation in tulip bulbs. It is recorded that in 1634 the rage among the Dutch to possess these bulbs was so great that the ordinary industry of the country was neglected and the population, even to its lowest dregs, embarked in the tulip trade. Men made fantastic fortunes, and lost them, buying and selling the bulbs.

Melyn, at heart an adventurer, must have been involved with tulips, but whether he made money, or lost it when people came to their senses and the bottom dropped out of the factitious market, is not known. Be that as it may, in 1637 or '38 his thoughts turned seriously toward New Netherland.

Perhaps it was through the connection between tanning and fur and pelts that he came to know Killian van Rensselaer, Patroon of vast properties on the Hudson.

Van Renssalaer, needing a trustworthy man to act as supercargo or business manager on one of his ships, engaged Melyn. The vessel carried a number of colonists, as well as eighteen young mares, thousands of bricks, clothing material, spices, cheese, soap, oil and a box of earth in which were planted young grape vines.

Melyn, Van Rensselaer wrote, should be wise, should keep the fear of God before his eyes, and might read eight valuable books in a certain package aboard the ship.

No special trouble is suggested in regard to the trip across or the arrival in New Netherland. Melyn must have looked over the situation here and decided then to return with his family as colonists. Still in Van Rensselaer's employ, but now having a part interest in the boat and cargo, he sailed for home by way of Newfoundland.

In regard to that voyage and its stop-over in Newfoundland, Van Rensselaer wrote some months later: "Cornelis Melyn is still in France. He sold our ship there with profit but through lack of knowledge of the matter has had a poor catch and caught not much over 12,000 codfish. In course of time this will have to be looked after better, at present we must pay for our experience."

As a result of these engagements and transactions, and in spite of the disappointingly few codfish, Melyn seems to have come home with some capital.

He negotiated with the Dutch West India Company for the patroonship of Staten Island, which, despite the fact that De Vries was already in possession, he obtained on July 3, 1640.

Cornelis wasted no time then but went about persuading other men to join him in the great venture. Forty decided to come, some with families, some alone. He bought cows, pigs, oxen, chickens, food and water for animals and people; he bought farm equipment, seeds, necessary household articles and had everything loaded on the *Angel Gabriel*. Early in August in 1640 he got his people aboard and set sail.

Scarcely were they out of sight of land when there occurred one of the many heartbreaking disasters of Melyn's life. The ship was attacked by "Dunkirkers," the French, and he was robbed of everything.

It is recorded briefly that after "great tribulation" he made his way home with his family. Many men after such an experience would have given up the whole project and turned to some safer and simpler alternative, but not Melyn. He raised more money and inspired the same, or other men, to accompany him to New Netherland. In all his life he never lacked friends and followers. Now he bought more live stock, food and equipment, overcame the inevitable reluctance of his family, got everything and everyone aboard a ship, the *Oak Tree*, and once more set sail.

This time no disaster overtook them. Melyn arrived on August 20, 1641, and landed with the announcement that he was Staten Island's Patroon.

But Patroon De Vries was already established at the Watering Place! It was an unpleasant shock to both men and disconcerting evidence of the Dutch West India Company's bungling mismanagement.

Eleven days later the Raritans attacked Staten Island.

Melyn and his people must have been dismayed and appalled when they found themselves in the midst of a war of the savages. It was terrifying and unbelievable. The Dutch West India Company had assured its colonists that they would be protected, had declared that the "aborigines" would give no trouble at all, that they had always lived in friendship with the Dutch people "like lambs."





The Pig War finally ended but its tragic consequences went on for years. The tenuous bond of trust between the natives and the settlers was broken and never knotted together again. Violence bred violence. More trouble was developing with the Indians who had legitimate grievances.

One of the basic causes of their unrest was that Kieft had for some time demanded from them voluntary contributions, gifts and tributes for unspecified "protection." The Indians declared angrily that they had no need for protection, nor had they received any. When the Dutch first arrived the tribes had helped them in many ways. They had guided them through the forests, taught them how to build canoes and houses of logs and bark and, when food was scarce, had supplied them with venison, fish, wild birds and corn. But they disliked and distrusted Kieft, nor did they hesitate to show this. It must have annoyed him to have them go about shouting: "We want Wouter! We want Wouter!" This referred to Wouter van Twiller of whom the Indians had been fond.

In growing discontent and resentment they committed acts of violence. They attacked and killed several of the Dutch and refused to give up for punishment the men responsible. Time passed and relationships became more and more strained. Nearly two years and a half after the outbreak of the Pig War there occurred one of the most shocking episodes in the history of this country. Kieft authorized an attack upon an encampment of Indians at Corlear's Hook on Manhattan, and one across the Hudson at Pavonia on the New Jersey shore. These took place late in February, 1643, on a night of bitter cold.

Rumors of impending disaster reached De Vries in his house up the Hudson at Vriesendael. He went to his little harbor, got into his canoe among the frozen reeds and paddled down through the ice floes. His purpose was to dissuade Kieft from permitting the attack. This he was unable to do and from Fort Amsterdam he watched flames from across the river and heard shots and shrieks.

The *Breedon Raedt* is an anonymous account of this engagement. Cornelis Melyn, who was by now well established on Staten Island, is thought to have been its author. It describes in horrifying detail: "Between the 25th and 26th February at midnight eighty and odd savages were murdered at Pavonia by eighty soldiers. Young children, some of them snatched from their mothers were cut in pieces before the eyes of their parents and the pieces thrown into the fire or the water. Some children of from five to six years of age, as also some infirm old persons who had managed to hide themselves in the bushes and reeds, came out in the morning to beg for a piece of bread or for permission to warm themselves, but were all murdered in cold blood."

Further atrocities are too gruesome to quote here. The author of the *Breedon Raedt* comments: "After this exploit the soliders were recompensed for their services and thanked by Kieft in person." Also described is the Director's laughter as he stood by and watched an atrocious act of barbarity his men performed upon one of the captured Indians. Melyn, if he was the author, omits one shocking incident. Another source states that when several severed heads of Indians were brought back as trophies to Fort Amsterdam, Van Tienhoven's mother-in-law kicked them around in the mud.

On that same night another expeditionary force of Dutchmen massacred Indians encamped at Corlears Hook. It was as brutal an affair as that at Pavonia but not reported as graphically.

The results of these attacks were not at all as Kieft had expected. The decent people of the community were sickened and aghast. The prominent men, those of good-will and wisdom, saw that in instigating such unnecessary assaults Kieft had jeopardised the future of New Netherland.

This was indeed so.

Far from accepting this punishment in humble spirit and far from being cowed and defeated, the Indians rose in flaming retaliation, attacking settlements on upper Manhattan, Long Island, in Westchester and up the Hudson.

Although there is some doubt about the exact date it appears that at this approximate time Melyn's settlement on Staten Island was also destroyed.

Even De Vries had become indetified in the minds of certain Indians with the whole perfidious race of white men. His houses and barns, his fields and stored provisions at Vriesendael were destroyed and his livestock stolen. Still he felt that the Indians were not fundamentally to blame. Throughout that spring and summer he tried his discouraged best to bring about peace, but was unsuccessful. Left to himself he could undoubtedly have accomplished it, but it was impossible with Kieft in authority.

De Vries, in sorrow and bitterness and to the great loss of New Netherland, went home in October of 1643. His farms were in ashes.

He wrote in his journal: "The 8th of this same month took my leave of Commander Kieft and told him that the murder which he had committed was so much innocent blood; that it would yet be avenged upon him, and there I left him."

He went on a Rotterdam fisherman's boat to Virginia "in order to proceed from thence to Europe. Sailed past Sandy Hook where we were detained two days by contrary winds. Picked each day some of the plums which are abundant there and grow there wild."

So De Vries, one of the very few men of honor, whom the Indians knew they could trust with their lives, left the New World; however, Cornelis Melyn stayed and combatted despotism. In that hot and frightening summer the men and women of New Amsterdam knew how vulnerable they were, knew how deeply and with what reason the natives hated Kieft. They were never free of fear.

Not only was there ever present danger from the Indians, but Kieft was proving a most inefficient administrator. Or perhaps the general falling-to-pieces of everything was more the fault of the West India Company.

For a long time now the principal citizens of New Amsterdam had been demanding a voice in the government of their community. Finally Kieft gave in, appointing first a council of twelve men and after dissolving that, a council of eight. Cornelis Melyn and Kuyter, his friend, were among the eight. They met with Kieft in September 1643 and passed some good resolutions "forbidding taverns and other improprieties and appointing a week's preaching, but no attention was paid." These eight men were not called again for seven months and "no sooner did they open their mouths than the Director met them with biting and scoffing taunts."

Conditions were deteriorating alarmingly. Because of the menace of Indians, crops could not be planted in the fields, places were abandoned, men brought their families from outlying isolated settlements to Manhattan and were existing miserably in straw huts outside the fort. There was widespread poverty and such an alarming shortage of food that people feared actual famine. Fort Amsterdam was in grave disrepair; pigs rooted in the mud walls; the garrison consisted of only fifty or sixty soldiers unprovided with ammunition, and unpaid. The community was defenseless, standing open to the enemy. Kieft was unable to accomplish anything constructive. The Company did nothing at all but talk and regret the unfortunate state of affairs.

Melyn decided to take action himself, with Kuyter's cooperation. Representing the opinion of the council of eight he wrote letters directly to the States-General. In doing this he went over the heads of Kieft and of the Company.

He explained the deplorable conditions in New Netherland, saying: "The Director, by uncalled for proceedings has embittered the natives against the Dutch nation." Melyn described how the colonists had been pursued by wild heathen and barbarous savages with fire and sword and been murdered cruelly. Children had been tomahawked in their parents' arms or taken away into bondage. He ended one of his letters to the States-General: "Honored Lords, what we have to complain of is that one man should so dispose of our lives and properties



at his will and pleasure in a manner so arbitrary that a king dare not legally do the like. What we ask for is a new governor and a new system of government; deputies to be elected by the people and a council to meet together with the governor so that the entire country may not hereafter at the whim of one man be reduced to similar dangers."

The States-General read these letters and after their custom passed them from one committee to another for consideration. On April 5, 1644 they wrote: "Resolved that a copy of this remonstrance might be forwarded to the Assembly of XIX of the Dutch West India Company so that prompt action may be taken on said complaints and for the removal of said inconveniences."

On April 23 the Amsterdam Chamber of the West India Company wrote: "that they appreciate their High Mightinesses' paternal and gracious care for this wretched commonality of New Netherland, they feel in the deepest recesses of their hearts the miserable and desolate conditions of the poor people there, but the Company has fallen into such inability and discredit that it cannot supply necessary provisions or ammunitions to New Netherland and it feels that greater and greater difficulties will be encountered and it needs considerable aid from the State." An immediate grant of about one million guilders was suggested.

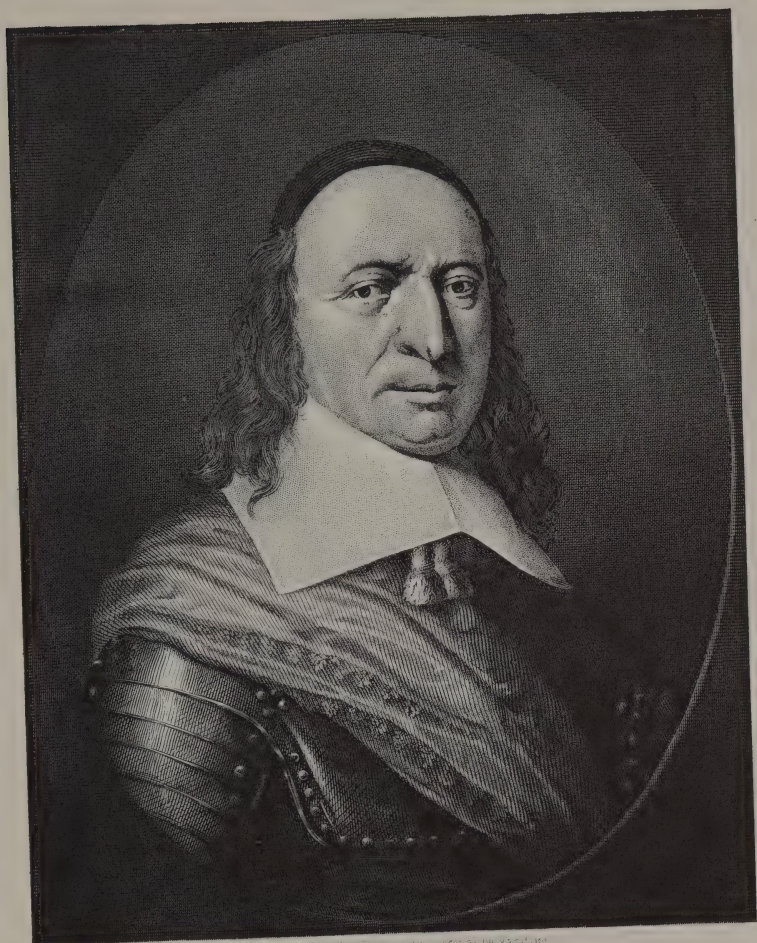
The grant was not forthcoming.

After four years of letter writing, investigations and committee ponderings, "prompt action" was taken; it was decided that Kieft was to be recalled, and a new governor sent out to replace him in New Netherland.



The new Director General was Peter Stuyvesant.

He arrived in New Amsterdam on a windy Friday in May 1647. There was great excitement. Undoubtedly pupils of the school sang songs of welcome; probably some small girl offered the new governor a bunch of flowers; perhaps tulips which the Dutch people love. The cannon of the fort boomed out so many salutes that they used up the



ENGRAVED BY J. G. KNEELAND FOR J. H. VAN DER WEGE

*J. Huyjsz*

supply of gunpowder which should have been kept for defense. Stuyvesant sat in a highbacked chair with his hat on and his wooden leg stuck out in front of him, "quite like the grand duke of Muscovy." He made the leading men of New Amsterdam, the citizens of importance and dignity stand waiting, with their hats in their hands until he cared to notice them. Then he made a speech in which he announced that he intended to rule as a father does his children. Perhaps at this point Melyn and Kuyter and their friends exchanged glances, thinking that this was not at all what they had wished. Melyn and the others must have felt that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire, that they were no better off than they had been before. As a matter of fact for them conditions were worse.

This was partly Melyn's own fault. Stuyvesant suggested that everyone give a cheer and a vote of thanks for Kieft, who was leaving them. But Melyn said bluntly that he had nothing to thank Kieft for and would not join in any vote of gratitude. In this way he got off at once on the wrong foot, as it were, with Stuyvesant.

Shortly afterward, in conference together Kieft poured into Stuyvesant's ears a long tale of Melyn's ill doings. Stuyvesant became convinced that the man was a menace. He had caused Kieft to be recalled, to lose his office; if Melyn could do this to Kieft he might do the same to Stuyvesant. Why not? Melyn, and his friend Kuyter too, were threats to the sacredness of the office of governor. It was at this time when Stuyvesant declared angrily: "These boorish brutes will hereafter endeavor to knock me over also, but I shall now manage it so they will have their bellies full in all time to come."

He was a violent and vindictive man but it must be remembered that Stuyvesant was as sincere as Melyn. His idea of government was that of a dictator, a military leader. He had been governor of Curaçao and a general. He had lost his leg in battle with the Portuguese. If he, as a general, gave an order to someone under him and that order was disobeyed, or questioned, the man who did so was insubordinate, a traitor, and would be severely punished, if not shot. In his mind this principle applied also to civil life.

Melyn, on the other hand, believed in the new, revolutionary theory of government that was spreading over Europe. This had been clearly stated in the famous Declaration of Independence of the Dutch, signed in 1581. "If a prince is appointed by God over the land, 'tis to protect them from harm even as a shepherd to the guardianship of his flock. The subjects are not appointed by God for the behoof of the prince but the prince for his subjects, without whom he is no prince. Should he violate the laws he is to be foresaken by his meanest subject, and to be recognized no longer as a prince."



If either Stuyvesant or Melyn had been weaker there would have been less trouble between them. As it was they immediately became enemies.

Stuyvesant decided that he must, as soon as possible, get rid of Melyn and Kuyter. In regard to complaints to the States-General he declared, "People may think of appealing in my time. Should any one do so I would have him made a foot shorter, pack the pieces off to Holland and let him appeal in that way."

He summoned Melyn and Kuyter to court and had them charged with being pestilential trouble makers and seditious persons attempting to undermine authority. He had trumped-up accusations made against them, charging that they had stirred the Indians up to rebellion. This of course, was a bare-faced lie. Even as early as this in his administration, the people of New Amsterdam were afraid of him. Nobody wanted to antagonize the new governor. A prearranged verdict of guilty was passed against the two on trial and Stuyvesant decided that it would be just as well to finish all this definitely and quickly and have Melyn hanged. However, this plan roused such a popular protestation that he changed his mind and softened the punishment. Melyn and Kuyter were heavily fined and were to be banished from New Netherland, shipped away from their families and their lands for a long term of years.

There now follows a remarkable episode in the life of Melyn. It concerns the voyage of the ship, *Princess Amelia*. She carried many passengers; among them Kuyter and Melyn who were returning in disgrace to the Netherlands; one of Melyn's sons; other people including the Dominie Bogardus who also had made Kieft his enemy. And, strangely enough Kieft was aboard, going back to Holland with a fortune of ill-gotten gains. When the ship reached the Bristol Channel in England something went wrong. There was a fatal mistake in navigation. The *Princess Amelia* struck a rock and split. The Dominie Bogardus was drowned as was Melyn's son. Many other passengers and members of the crew were swept overboard and lost their lives. Kieft made his way along the tilting deck to Melyn and told him that he had treated him with great injustice and begged his forgiveness. Then a wave bore him into the sea and he too was drowned.

Melyn later wrote that he drifted around for eighteen hours before he finally got to land. Many English were crowded along the shore watching in horror. Among all these Melyn found his friend Kuyter, alive. Now it might be expected that Melyn would go off somewhere to rest and pull himself together after such an experience, and after the death of his son but again he showed unusual stamina and determination. For three days he searched among the wreckage and

finally found what he was hunting for: a chest of valuable papers.

These he and Kuyter took to the Netherlands, where they requested and were granted an audience before the States-General. After presenting their case they were completely exonerated and given a document referred to as the Mandamus. This was a safe-conduct home as well as a summons to Stuyvesant to return and explain his conduct to the States-General. This was Melyn's vindication, and his triumph lay ahead.



He returned in a ship whose port was Boston. Later Stuyvesant said that Melyn came "running down through New England" spreading untrue and damaging stories against the Dutch West India Company and the governor of New Netherland.

It is quite possible that Melyn did talk unwisely. He certainly acted so when he reached home.

He arrived just at the time when a large meeting was being held in the church and Stuyvesant was presiding, standing on the platform. Apparently Melyn had been preceded by rumors of the message he carried. He strode up the church aisle, with everybody in the seats watching. "Insulting and mutinously and in the sight of all the people of the community," Stuyvesant wrote later, Melyn handed him the document. The governor snatched it from him in such a rage that the official seal was torn off.

He never forgave Melyn for this public humiliation. From then on his hatred increased and he persecuted Melyn in every way within his means. Nor must it be forgotten that Stuyvesant felt that he was justified. As a general he considered Melyn a "mutinous subordinate in the ranks." He was his enemy and therefore the enemy of the community and the Company and must be destroyed.

Other colonists of New Netherland were now becoming dissatisfied with Stuyvesant's tyrannical rule. Under pressure from the people, he did appoint committees and councils but he never paid any attention to anyone's opinions or suggestions.

"The sworn Selectmen, chosen from the best and honestest of the people, were treated insultingly by Stuyvesant, whenever they did not find him in a good humor, and were berated as Bear-skinners, rascals, rabble, rebels; and though they were the people's representatives, their Commission was of no weight, save when they acted in accordance with the Director's pleasure and orders."

It was said that "he acted in the courts as an interested advocate of one party or another; whosoever contradicts him he berates as a fishfag. . . (he) forcibly seized fire-arms, the property of some freemen and secretly sold them to the Indians. (This was directly against the laws) Inspection, storage, carelessness and detention of goods fall so heavily on the merchant that he had as lief be a slave under the Turk as trader under the rules of the Company. By this means also is the trade of this country retrograding."

It was further said that: "the Director proceeds so rigorously against the Commandant of the Colonie Renslaerswyck and the Patroon of Staten Island that it is to be deplored and a scandal for neighboring Christians and heathen, causing him to be dragged forcibly by soldiers out of the Colonie and to be detained as prisoner on the Manhattans, and so terrifying Cornelis Melyn on Staten Island that he dare not leave the place nor entirely expose himself."

These and other more vivid complaints and remonstrances appear in the Holland Documents, written during Stuyvesant's administration.

Confusion and discontent increased until finally the people, the "commonalty" as they were rather insultingly termed, decided to send delegates to the States-General with reports of the intolerable difficulties of the colonists. Melyn was not chosen as a representative. Perhaps it was thought that he might seem to their High Mightinesses as over-prejudiced. However, several very good men were appointed.

The delegates sailed off to Holland and the States-General with their "Remonstrances." On leaving they said that New Netherland was lying at its last gasp.

Letters followed them telling of continuing and increasing troubles with Stuyvesant: imprisonments on "pretended" infringements of the laws, false witnesses, falsified evidence, tyrannical confiscations, "abuses and faults notorious as the sun at high noon." At a council meeting one old man who dared oppose the governor was struck by him across the face with a cane.

The delegates presented their Remonstrances to the States-General. In one document they asked that their High Mightinesses should "oust the West India Company and assume direct control of New Netherland; that New Amsterdam have a suitable municipal government; that the States-General should regard the golden example set by



New England neighbors, where neither patroons or princes are known, but only the people."

Again these requests and documents were handed on from one committee to another. Months passed, years passed, there was much talk and little action. Finally the delegates went home.

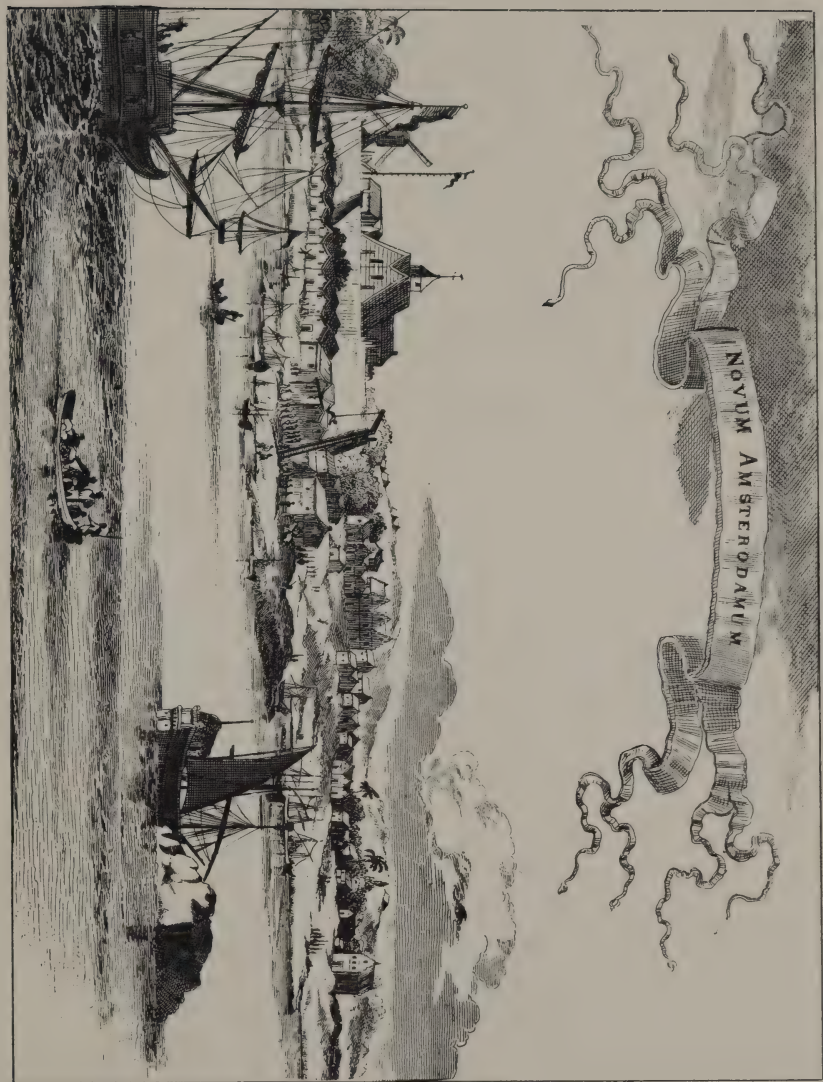
At about the time when these representatives went to Holland Melyn followed. He wanted to be present at hearings of some of the cases which might concern himself. Chiefly he wished to find a way in which to restock his ruined colony and raise more money, as his capital had been greatly diminished by misfortunes. When he reached Holland his good friends, as always, came forth with loans, the repayment of which troubled him. He also sold a third of his share of Staten Island and, possibly at that time the title of Patroon, to the Honorable Lord Hendrick van der Capellen.

Some years later in a letter to their High Mightinesses, the States-General, Van der Capellen styled himself: "Joncker Henrick van der Capellen tho Ryssel Lord of Issel and Hasselt, Burgomaster of the City of Zutphen, ordinary Deputy to your High Mightinesses Assembly." He for a brief time was Staten Island's fourth Patroon.

Now, in 1650, or thereabouts, he agreed to cooperate with Cornelis Melyn in building up his patroonship. Seventy new men were persuaded to immigrate. After stocking a ship, the *New Netherlands Fortune*, with everything necessary for agriculture, Melyn with the colonists set out for Staten Island again.

There followed then the unfortunate episode of the *New Netherlands Fortune*. It did not suffer shipwreck as had the *Princess Amelia*, nor was it captured in a sea fight as was the *Angel Gabriel*. But it was the object of a vicious attack by Stuyvesant. The trip this time from Holland to America was unusually long and difficult. There were storms, head winds and delays. The ship ran out of food and water and was obliged to put in for replenishments at Rhode Island. They then sailed down, arriving in New Netherland and, because of adverse tides and winds anchored off Staten Island. Thanking God for a safe arrival and freedom from the ship and the sea, the new colonists went ashore.

Melyn was in a mood of elation. He expected that all the commonalty and the Director as well would be overjoyed at the arrival of the *New Netherlands Fortune* with such a splendid multitude of people, farmers and farm laborers, stock and equipment; new blood and new hope for the community. But poor Melyn was not able to enjoy his happy satisfaction for more than a few hours. At sunset the Fiscal Van Dyke and a sergeant with other soldiers came aboard to prevent his unloading goods and selling them, without paying duty. He was ordered to command his crew to hoist anchor and sail up to Manhattan.



Stuyvesant, far from greeting the ship and Melyn with pleasure, began to "manifest his old hatred and partisanship."

He accused Melyn of unloading and selling cargo in Rhode Island for his private gain, thereby flagrantly defying and disobeying the rules and instructions of the Company. There was no truth in his accusation and, later, Stuyvesant got into much trouble with Baron van der Capellen over this, since the baron was chief owner of the ship. However at present Melyn, the scapegoat, was arrested and guarded with soldiers. The ship and goods were confiscated, nor was this all. The governor proceeded to attach and sell Melyn's house and land on Manhattan.

It seemed hopeless to try to recover his property there. Perhaps Melyn was too tired of the endless conflict with his enemy to combat him further at this time. He let the governor do as he pleased with the Manhattan properties and he went to Staten Island to join his family and his people.

He determined to devote all his energies to putting his farms in order, to building barns and houses, to establishing court, and to making a harbor. His ambition was to have Staten Island "an ornament of New Netherland, an honor and credit to the Honorable Company," and an inspiration to the other settlers in neighboring communities.

It seemed almost as if by his vision and effort and unremitting labors he might accomplish what he wished. For a few years he prospered and things went well. They had large crops of grain. Sixteen handsome farms were started, not only by himself but also by his children and the people sent over by Baron van der Capellen. There were twenty-seven buildings: houses, racks and barns for cattle; many milch cows and beautiful plow oxen. There were calves for increase. Melyn wrote that through God's blessing he began to recover his losses at last.





In 1655 Stuyvesant's animosity flared up again.

Some Swedes were threatening and harassing a small Dutch settlement on the Delaware. Stuyvesant chose to believe that Melyn traitorously had encouraged and arranged this attack. The governor sent Van Tienhoven, to Staten Island to bring Melyn to Manhattan to answer charges; but Melyn had already left for New Amsterdam having some business there.

As he landed he was met by Stuyvesant and a guard of soldiers. "Take hold of Melyn," the governor ordered, "conduct him to the guard house and secure him well."

This was done and he was kept in the guard house until Van Tienhoven returned from Staten Island. Then he was taken before the governor who asked him where were the letters he had received from the Swedes. Melyn thought this as strange as if he had been asked "for letters from the Grand Turk." He replied that he knew nothing of any letters from Sweden, nor did he expect any.

"You shall soon be taught to speak differently," Stuyvesant declared and ordered Van Tienhoven to throw Melyn into the dark hole, where he was not to see or speak with anyone. There he was kept for twenty-five days until the outbreak of the Peach War in August 1655.

At one Van Dyke's property on Manhattan near the present Dey street an Indian squaw stole a peach from his orchard. Van Dyke, seeing her do this, shot and killed her. The next day seventy canoes full of Indians, all angry and out for revenge, converged upon New Amsterdam. The Indians landed, sought Van Dyke and promptly shot him. They tomahawked a neighbor who rushed to his aid. Then they stormed through the town streets killing some people, terrorizing all. Why they did not burn all the buildings and massacre everyone is not known.

They did not pursue their vengeance there but reembarked in the canoes and everyone knew that their purpose was to attack the outlying settlements.

The governor was far away with his 600 fighting men, down on the Delaware. Melyn was still in the dark hole in the fort.

Janneke, his wife, their children and friends had been "running to and fro" interceding for him. Probably because of Stuyvesant's absence it was possible to effect Melyn's release. He hurried at once to Staten Island to try to save his people, his livestock, buildings and crops from the wrath of the natives.

This he was not able to do. A few days later the terrible news came that many canoes had landed on his island, countless Indians were approaching the settlement and already were attacking and burning outlying farms. He gathered as many of his people as he could into his

large dwelling fortress, where they prepared for a siege. Probably there was a palisade about this building. The Indians broke through and, either with burning arrows, or by creeping up with torches of blazing reeds, set fire to the wooden roof or walls. Melyn wrote that when the cinders began to fall they were obliged to leave and break through the Indians to run down to a smaller house on the shore. The scene can be easily imagined: the sounds of flaming violence, the conflagration, the smoke, the shots and cries. A son of Melyn's, a son-in-law and two nephews among others were killed in that rush into the open. Many were wounded, but survivors reached their refuge and barricaded themselves inside. Here they held out for some time longer, watching the harbor, hoping and praying for help from Manhattan, but none came.

Finally the small house too was set on fire and Melyn was faced with the terrible alternative of allowing his people to be burned alive where they were, or of surrendering to the Indians and facing probable torture. He chose to take that risk, offering the Indians ransom if his people were released unharmed.

They were taken prisoner but they were not tortured. Fifty-one persons went into captivity with the savages. For thirty-one days they were kept in the encampment at Pavonia while negotiations were being carried on between the Indians and friends on Manhattan.

Finally the ransom money, about 1,400 guilders, was brought across the river and Melyn and his family were released.

He wrote that it was just in time, for the fire had been prepared and lighted for their burning. Still, they were saved and taken over to Manhattan, "as miserable as they might well be." They had lost friends, members of their family, and all their possessions. They hoped "for some quiet after their sad imprisonment."

The next day soldiers with firearms and swords came to tell Melyn that the Director said he must raise still more ransom, that the Indians were not yet satisfied. If he declined to do this he would be put in his former prison.

For Melyn this was the end of his efforts. He felt it was a charge trumped up by the governor to ruin him. In order not to "perish utterly because of the bitter hatred of Stuyvesant" he resolved to quit Manhattan and, with his wife and family put himself under the protection of the English. This he subsequently did, moving to New Haven, and thus he fades out of the Staten Island picture.

Baron van der Capellen was for a short time its authorized Patroon, but he never lived on the island and his settlements were also destroyed in the Peach War.

For six years after this Staten Island was largely deserted.

Probably two or three families and a few soldiers remained. It was a time of transition, a time when there were many business deals and controversies over who owned the land, who had sold it to whom. The Indians remained, and the bear and the wolves and the wild birds.

Finally, other men, a group of nineteen under the leadership of Pierre Billiou, petitioned Stuyvesant for land on August 22, 1661. Not long afterward the hardiest of the lot established at the present South Beach, near the foot of Ocean avenue, what is called today "Staten Island's first permanent settlement."

Little is known about Melyn's subsequent life in New Haven. At least he was free of Stuyvesant. He took the oath of allegiance to the English king, nor can one blame him for that. Apparently he did not sink into the idleness of a defeated old age. He established a brewery. He still maintained some of his interests in New Netherland, and Janneke, his wife, seems to have remained there for some time to administer them. They were always trying to salvage something from the wreckage. Court records show her as being involved in several law suits about such matters as cows "alienated" or goods promised and not delivered.

Richard Smith, the proprietor of Smithtown on Long Island, the one who, legend has it, rode on the back of a bull to establish his boundaries, brought suit against Melyn for failure to deliver two ankers of strong water in payment of a note. Melyn countered with a suit charging the complainant with intimidating Janneke Melyn into promising to pay the debt with 114 beaver pelts in default of the strong water. Finally the matter was settled out of court.

So Melyn's stormy pattern of life continued. He made at least one more voyage back to Holland. In all he made twelve, including his first voyage as supercargo for Killian van Rennselaer.

As for Stuyvesant, because of the fury of opposition to him, the States-General and the Company decided to recall him, but since war broke out just then between Britain and Holland, it was decided to leave him where he was. Indecision and vacillation as usual!

It would appear that he triumphed over Cornelis Melyn, but who knows?

Stuyvesant had stood for tyranny and Melyn for justice. Those who champion justice often win martyrdom and seldom glittering rewards. But theirs is the honor, true though intangible.

In 1664 Peter Stuyvesant lost New Netherland to the British. It has been hinted, although never authenticated, that perhaps Melyn had something to do with that.

Ten years later he was dead: Staten Island's third and most courageous Patroon.

The End



SOURCES—

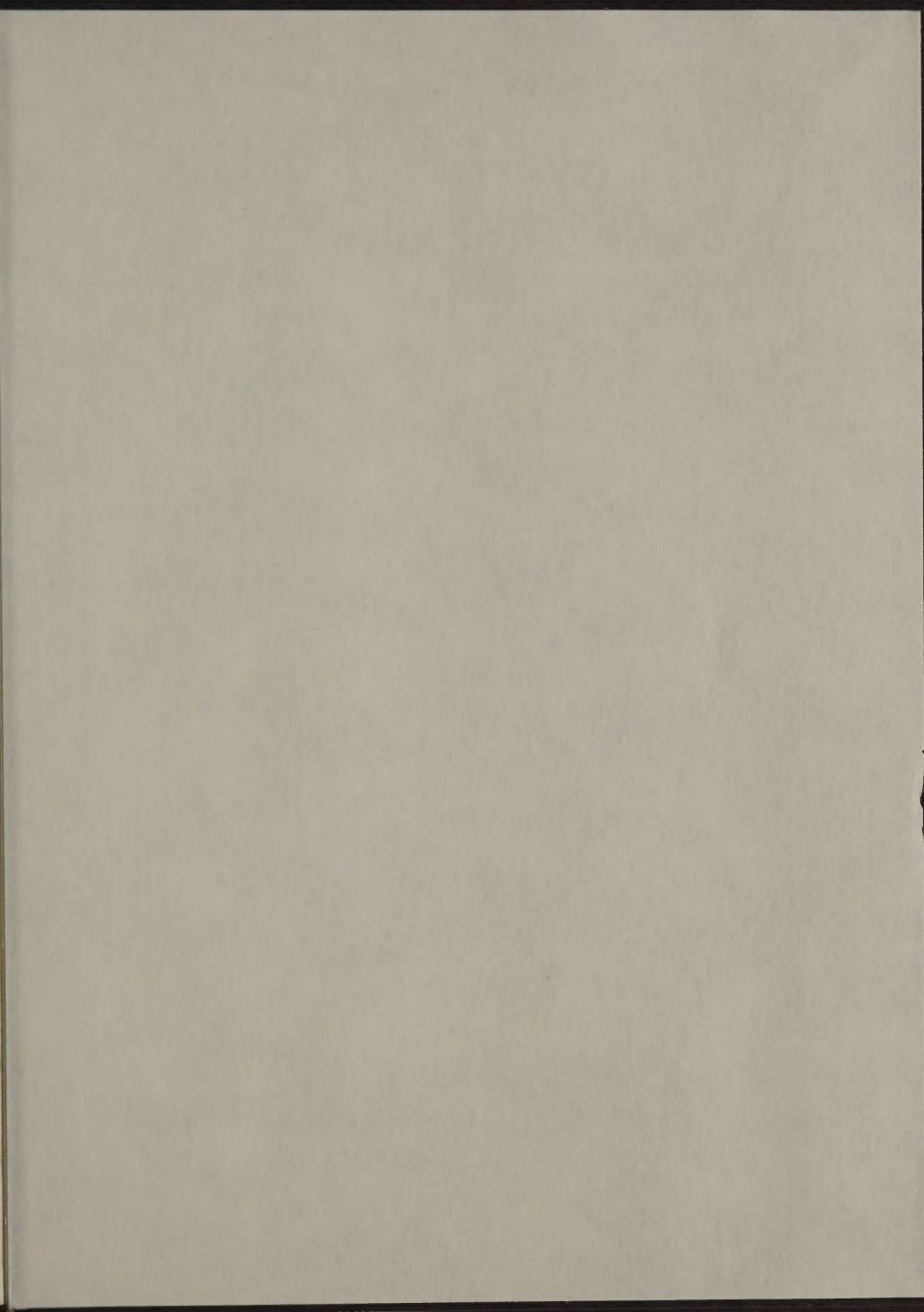
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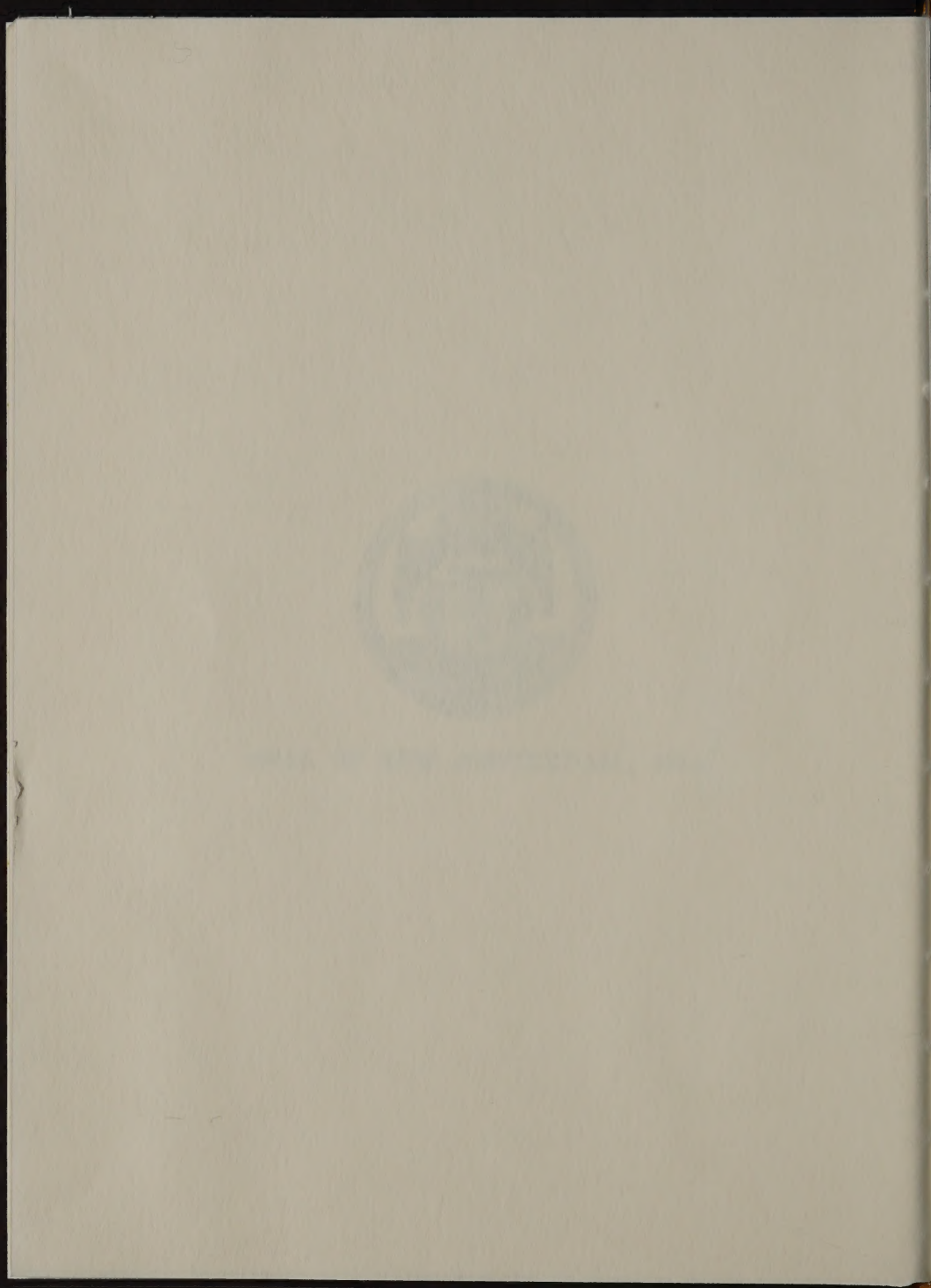




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